



Fact Sheet

California Environmental Protection Agency

 **Air Resources Board**

Backyard Burning

What you don't know can hurt you

Some people still have 55-gallon drums in their yards that they use to burn household garbage and rubbish. It's important to know that burning these materials can release some very unhealthy pollutants that can affect you, your family, and your community. Below are some facts about the public health problem posed by the use of burn barrels.

- Burn barrels are a public health concern. Many of the items that get burned in these barrels produce highly toxic chemicals that can linger in the environment and our bodies for a long time.
- Plastics and certain paper products release some of the worst chemicals when burned. Certain wood products, like those treated to prevent rot or decay, also contain toxic chemicals that are released when burned.
- The worst chemicals released during burning are dioxins and furans. These highly toxic chemicals can cause cancer and immune system damage. Other cancer causing chemicals are also generated such as benzene and butadiene. The smoke produced by burn barrels may result in other types of health effects, such as triggering asthma attacks.
- A baby or young child, especially one who is breast-feeding, may be among the most vulnerable of family members, particularly to dioxin and furan emissions.
- About 800,000 households are allowed to burn some form of household waste in burn barrels. This burning is one of the largest sources of dioxins in California. While other sources of dioxins such as municipal and medical waste incinerators have strict emission controls, household waste burning does not.
- Avoiding the plume of smoke is not sufficient to eliminate the potential health risks. These chemicals can travel long distances, and can deposit on soil, plants, and in water. The ash from the barrel also contains these chemicals, which can be released into the soil and water. Animals and fish can ingest the toxic chemicals, and plants can absorb them. These can then be passed on to humans when eaten.

What is the Air Resources Board Doing?

- To protect public health, the Air Resources Board (ARB) is proposing a statewide requirement to eliminate burning of household garbage and rubbish in burn barrels, except in very remote areas where garbage service is not available, the distance to a landfill is too far, and the population is low. This requirement will take effect in 2003.
- We are conducting workshops throughout the State to share information on this proposal during December 2001 and January 2002.
- A public hearing will be held to consider the statewide proposal in February 2002.

Additional Information Sources

- ARB Residential Burning Web Page:
<http://www.arb.ca.gov/smp/resburn/resburn.htm>
- ARB Air Toxics Web Page: <http://www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/toxics.htm>
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) Air Toxics Web Page: <http://www.epa.gov/oar/toxicair/newtoxics.html>
- U.S. EPA Report on Burn Barrels:
<http://www.epa.gov/ttnatw01/burn/barlbrn1.pdf>
- ARB Public Information Office: (916) 322-2990

If you are a person with disability and desire to obtain this document in an alternative format, please contact the Air Resources Board Coordinator at (916) 323-4916. Persons with hearing or speech impairments can contact us by using our Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (916) 324-9531, or (800) 700-8326 for TDD calls from outside the Sacramento area.

The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see our Website: <http://www.arb.ca.gov>.